

[Matthew White]

W15468

[(dup of W15463)?] 1 Conn. 1038-9 [White?]

Matthew White, brother of Robert White, lives in one of the remodeled "company" houses on North Main street, has been employed at the Plume and Atwood mill for more than fifty years. His two sons, age 23 and [28?], are employed also at the plant, though neither is following in the footsteps of the father, who is a roller.

"I believe the lads should have a little easier work than what I had, " says Mr. White. "I've worked hard in my time, and maybe it hasn't hurt me any, but if the boys can get along without breakin' their backs, why, so much the better, I figure.

"I've worked in the mill in my day, until nine o'clock at night, from seven in the mornin', with an hour off for lunch. That's too much, I don't think you'll ever see the like of that again, though. And a good thing, too. I wouldn't want to go back to it, and I don't think anyone else would. An eight hour day is long enough.

"So you've talked with my brother Bob, have you? Bob'll tell you he can't remember much about the early days, but the fact is he's better at it than I am. Even though I worked there longer.

I started in when I was fifteen, and that was in eighty-eight. I worked on quite a few different jobs before they put me on the rolls, but I been on 'em now for the past thirty-five years. Change? Oh, hell, yes, plenty of changes. More than I could remember off hand. Why the mill itself, look how that's grown.

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"It was burned down once, you know. A good bit before my time, of course, I think it was in the early fifties. But when I went in, there wasn't the buildin's there are now. It was a kind of a dinky little place.

"And all the houses over on Railroad street and this row here up on North Main street were owned by the company. All the people up here, like me, bought these houses off the company. I think they still own a few of them over on Railroad street, though.

"There wasn't a Polack nor a Russian in town. No, wait a minute, there was. There was old August Zeinar, he was a Polack, though he wouldn't admit it. Lived up there on that little farm past the Sailor's Home. Him and his wife and two sons.

"That's the man that brought the Polish in, if you're interested in that kind of history. It was sometime durin' the nineties, I should say, when they started comin' in here.

"They boarded up to August's too, most of them, when they first came here. You see he made a kind of a racket out of it. He'd get 'em a job, for ten dollars, and then they'd board at his house and he'd get more money out of 'em. Pretty good, hey?

"Well, after August started 'em comin', they came in in droves. I s'pose them that August had brought here would write to relatives and friends and get them to come. And now you've got your whole East Side, is all Polish and Russian, and even some over on this side of town.

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"All Americans and Irish, when I first went in there. Old Man Beardslee from Plymouth was my boss. They give me a man's work, jugglin' brass, but I was a husky lad and it didn't bother me none. I was as strong at fifteen as I was give [five?] years later. They didn't give me a man's pay, though, they started me at a dollar a day.

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"But old Beardslee saw the work I was doin' and he told me one day, he says, 'satt, you're doin' as much as any man, and you ought to get the man's wage.' And right after that they gave me a dollar and a half. A dollar and a half was the pay in those days for ordinary labor.

"Mr. French, the head of the company, he was workin' in the castin' shop when I went to work. He wasn't even a caster. He was helpin' his brother Will, pullin' out the pots. Will was a caster. Mr. Kenea was boss caster. Jim Chatfield was millwright. Jim was quite a fella, you ought to get somethin' about him. He designed the dryin' out machine, and some of the other stuff over there. Got patents on it. They used that dryin' out machine in a lot of the other mills, and Jim used to go around and show 'em how to work it.

"I s'pose one of the biggest changes is in the castin' shop. Most all electric furnaces in there now. How many hand fires they got now?" (Mr. White directs his question at his younger son, who replies that there are two.)

"They haven't changed as much as some of the bigger places, I believe you'll find," says Mr. White. "I mean, of course, they've put in modern machinery and modern methods to a great 4 extent, but they still do more handwork than the big mills. They haven't put any of this speedup in, either, like they have down at the clock shop."

Young Mr. White: "The casters still pay their own helpers.

Mr. White: "They've been doin' that ever since I remember. I didn't know they still did it."

Young Mr. White: "That's on the hand fires, of course."

Mr. White: "It's a pretty good place to work, the mill. Sometimes it's a little slow, but they always keep you on the payroll. They have their slow periods, but not like the clock shop."

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Young Mr. White: "Kellogg Plume says the brass industry takes its cue from steel. If steel is slow, brass is slow. If steel picks up, brass picks up."

Mr. White: "That's the truth. It's a little slow right now, but it'll pick up. It always has."

Young Mr. White: "It's better than the clock shop. The only one sure of his job down there is the errand boy."